



BECAUSE HER HUSBAND WILL NOT LET HER HELP TAKE CARE OF THE TWINS, AND BECAUSE SHE HATES IDLENESS, ROSE HAS A VERY SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT WITH RODNEY

SYNOPSIS.—Rose Stanton marries Rodney Aldrich, a wealthy young lawyer, after a brief courtship, and is taken up by Chicago's exclusive social set and made a part of the gay whirl of the rich folk. It is all new to the girl, and for the first few months she is charmed with the life. And then she comes to feel that she is living a useless existence, that she is a social butterfly, a mere ornament in her husband's home. Rose longs to do something useful and to have the opportunity to employ her mind and utilize her talent and education. Rodney feels much the same way himself. He thinks he ought to portend around in society just to please his wife, when in reality he'd rather be giving his nights to study or social service of some sort. They try to reach an understanding following the visit of two New York friends, who have worked out satisfactorily this same problem. Then Rose decides that her job as mother is a big one, and she looks eagerly forward to the great event, but she has twins and is unable to care for both the babies at once.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Dam Gives Way.

She began getting her strength back very fast in the next two or three days, but this queer funk in her emotions didn't straighten out. She came to see that it was absurd—monstrous almost, but that didn't help. Instead of a baby, she had given birth to two. They were hers, of course, as much as one would have been. Only, her soul, which had been waiting so ecstatically for its miracle—its child, which by making her a mother, should supply what her life needed—her soul wouldn't—couldn't accept the substitution. Those two droll, thin-voiced, squalling little nits that were exhibited to her every morning, were as foreign to her, as if they had been brought into the house in a basket.

When Harriet came in for the first time to see her, Rose knew, Harriet was living here now, running the house for Rodney, while Rose was laid up. Doing it beautifully well, too, through all the confusion of nurses and all, Harriet said:

"I think you're in great luck to have had two at once; get your duty to posterity done that much sooner. And, of course, you couldn't possibly be expected to nurse two great creatures like that."

Rose acquiesced. She would have struggled, though, she knew, but for that queer funk fate had played her. Her heart ached.

When she found that struggling with herself, denouncing herself for a brute, didn't serve to bring up the feelings toward the twins that she knew any proper mother ought to have, she buried the dark fact as deep as she could, and pretended. It was only before Rodney that the pretense was really necessary. And with him, really, it was hardly a pretense at all. He was such a child himself, in his gleeful delight over the possession of a son and a daughter, that she felt for him, tenderly, mistily, lunatically, the very emotion she was trying to capture for them—felt like cradling his head in her weak arms, kissing him, crying over him.

She wouldn't have been allowed to do that to the babies, anyway. They were going to be terribly well brought up, those twins; that was apparent from the beginning. They had two nurses all to themselves, quite apart from Miss Harris, who looked after Rose—Mrs. Ruston and Doris, the maid, who were destined, it appeared, to be as permanent as the babies. But Rose had the germ of an idea of her own about that.

They got them named with very little difficulty. The boy was Rodney, of course, after his father and grandfather before him. Rose was a little afraid Rodney would want the girl named after her, and was relieved to find he didn't. There'd never in the world be but one Rose for him, he said. So Rose named the girl Portia. They kept Rose in bed for three weeks; flat on her back as much as possible, which was terribly irksome to her, since her strength and vitality were coming back so fast. She might have rebelled, had it not been for that germinal idea of hers. It wouldn't do, she saw, in the light of that, to give them any excuse for calling her unreasonable.

One Sunday morning, Rodney carried her upstairs to the nursery to see her babies bathed. This was a big room at the top of the house which Florence McCrea had always vaguely intended to make into a studio. But, in the paralysis of indecision as to what sort of studio to make it, she had left the thing bare.

Rodney had given Harriet carte blanche to go ahead and fit it up before he and Rose came back from the seashore, and the layette was a mon-

ument to Harriet's practicality. There had been a wild day of supplementing, of course, when it was discovered that there were two babies instead of one.

The room, when they escorted Rose into it, was a terribly impressive place. The spirit of a barren, sterile efficiency brooded everywhere. And this appearance of barrenness obtained despite the presence of an enormous number of articles—a pair of scales, a perfect battery of electric heaters of various sorts; rows of vacuum jars for keeping things cold or hot; a small sterilizing oven; instruments and appliances that Rose couldn't guess the uses or the names of. Mrs. Ruston, of course, was master of them all, and Doris flew about to do her bidding under a watchful eye.

Rose surveyed this scene, just as she would have surveyed a laboratory, or a factory where they make something complicated, like watches. That's what it was, really. Those two pink little objects, in their two severe-looking baskets, were factory products. At precise and unalterable intervals, a highly scientific compound of fats and proteins was put into them. They were inspected, weighed, submitted to a routine of other processes. And in all the routine, there was nothing that their mother, now they were fairly born, was wanted for.

Rose kept those ideas to herself and kept an eye on young Doris, listened to the orders she got, and studied nervously what she did in the execution of them.

Rodney had a lovely time watching the twins bathed. He stood about in everybody's way, made what he con-



Rose Surveyed This Scene.

ceived to be alluring noises, and finally turned suddenly to his wife and said: "Don't you want to—hold them, Rose?" A stab of pain went through her, and tears came up into her eyes. "Yes, give them to me," she started to say.

But Mrs. Ruston spoke before she could frame the words. It was their feeding hour, a bad time for them to be excited, and the bottles were heated exactly right.

By that time Rose's idea had flowered into resolution. But she mustn't jeopardize the success of her plan by trying to put it into effect too soon. She waited patiently, reasonably, for another fortnight. Harriet, by that time, had gone off to Washington on a visit, taking Rodney's heartfelt thanks with her. Rose expressed hers

just as well, and felt assured that they were so unreal. She simply mustn't let herself get to resenting Harriet! At the end of the fortnight, the doctor made his final visit. Rose had especially asked Rodney to be on hand to hear his report when the examination was over.

"He says," Rose told her husband, "that I'm perfectly well." She turned to the doctor for confirmation. "Don't you?"

The doctor smiled. "As far as my diagnostic resources go, Mrs. Aldrich, you are perfectly well."

Rose smiled widely and contentedly upon them. "That's delightful," she said to the doctor. "Thanks very much."

But after he had gone she found Mrs. Ruston in the nursery and had a talk with that lady, which was destined to produce seismic upheavals.

"I've decided to make a little change in our arrangements, Mrs. Ruston," she said. "But I don't think it's one that will disturb you very much. I'm going to let Doris go—I'll get her another place, of course—and do her work myself."

Mrs. Ruston compressed her lips, and went on for a minute with what she was doing to one of the twins, as if she hadn't heard. "Doris is quite satisfactory, madam," she said at last. "I'd not advise making a change. She's a dependable young woman, as such go. Of course I watch her very close."

"I think I can promise to be dependable," Rose said. "I don't know much about babies, but I think I can learn as well as Doris. Anyhow, I can wheel them about and wash their clothes and boil their bottles and things as well as she does. And you can tell me what to do just as you tell her."

To this last observation it became evident that Mrs. Ruston meant to make no reply at all. She gave Rose some statistical information about the twins instead, in which Rose showed herself politely interested, and presently withdrew.

Rodney wore a queer expression all through dinner, and when he got Rose alone in the library afterward, he explained it. Mrs. Ruston had given him notice, contingently. Rose had informed her of her intention to disperse with the service of two nursemaids. If Rose adhered to this intention, Mrs. Ruston must leave.

It was some sort of absurd misunderstanding, of course, Rodney concluded, and wanted to know what it was all about.

"I did say I meant to let Doris go," Rose explained, "but I told her I meant to take Doris' job myself. I said I thought I could be just as good a nursemaid as she was. And I meant it."

He was prowling about the room in a worried sort of way, before she got as far as that. "I don't see, child," he exclaimed, "why you couldn't leave well enough alone! If it's that old economy bug of yours again, it's nonsense. You, to spend all your time doing mental work to save me ten dollars a week!"

"It isn't mental work," Rose insisted. "It's apprentice work. After I've been at it six months, learning as fast as I can, I'll be able to let Mrs. Ruston go and take her job—I'll be really competent to take care of my own children. I don't pretend I am now."

He stared at her in perfectly honest bewilderment. "You're talking rather odd, I think, Rose," he said very quietly.

"I'm talking what I've learned from you," she said. "Oh, Rodney, please try to forget that I'm your wife and that you're in love with me. Can't you just say: 'Here's A or B or X, a perfectly healthy woman, twenty-two years old, and a little real work would be good for her?'"

She went, with much pleading, a sort of troubled half-scent from him. The matter could be taken up again with Mrs. Ruston.

Given a fair field, Rose might have won a victory here. But, as Portia had said once, the pattern was cut differently. There was a sudden alarm one night, when her little namesake was found strangling with the croup. There were seven terrifying hours—almost unendurable hours, while the young life swung and balanced over the ultimate abyss. The heroine of those hours was Mrs. Ruston. That the child lived was clearly creditable to her.

Rose made another effort even after that, though she knew she was beaten in advance. She waited until the old calm routine was re-established. Then, once more, she asked for her chance.

But Rodney exploded before she got the words fairly out of her mouth. "No," he shouted. "I won't consider it! She's saved that baby's life. You'll have to find some way of satisfying your whims that won't jeopardize your babies' lives. After that night—good heavens, Rose, have you forgotten that night?—I'm going to play it safe."

Rose paled a little and sat ivory still in her chair. There were no miracles any more. The great dam was swept away.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Only Remedy.

She was in the grip of an appalling realization. This moment—this actually present moment that was going to last only until she should speak for the next time—was the critical moment of her life.

"Roddy . . ." she said.

He was slumped down in a big easy chair at the other side of the table, swinging a restless foot; drumming now and then with his fingers. Some-

sort of scene was inevitable, he knew. And he sat there waiting for it.

He thought he was ready for anything. But just the way she spoke his name startled—almost frightened him, she said it so quietly, so—tenderly.

"Roddy," she said. "I want you to come over here and kiss me, and then go back and sit down in that chair again."

He went a little pale at that. The swing of his foot was arrested suddenly. But, for a moment, he made no move—just looked wonderingly into her great, gray eyes.

"Something's going to happen," she went on, "and before it's over, I'm afraid it's going to hurt you terribly—and me. And I want the kiss for you to remember. So that we'll always know, whatever happens afterward, that we loved each other." She held out her arms to him. "Won't you come?"

He came—a man bewildered, bent down over her, and found her lips; but almost absently, out of a daze.

"No, not like that," she murmured. "In the old way."

There was a long embrace. "I don't believe I'd have the courage to do it," she said, "if it were just me. But there's someone else—I've made someone a promise. I can't tell you about that. Now please go back and sit over there where you were, where we can talk quietly. Oh, Roddy, I love you so—No, please go back, old man! And—light your pipe. Oh, don't tremble like that! It isn't a tragedy. It's—for us, it's the greatest hope in the world."

He went back to his chair. He even lighted his pipe as she asked him to, and waited as steadily as he could for her to begin.

"Do you remember . . ." she began, and it was remarkable how quiet and steady her voice was. There was even the trace of a smile about her wonderful mouth. "Do you remember that afternoon of ours, the very first of them, when you brought home my notebooks and found me asleep on the couch in our old back parlor? Do you remember how you told me that one's desires were the only motive power he had? Well, it was a funny thing—I got to wondering afterward what my desires were, and it seemed I hadn't any. Everything had, somehow, come to me before I knew I wanted it. Everything in the world, even your love for me, came like that."

"But I've got a passion now, Rodney. I've had it for a long while. It's a desire I can't satisfy. The thing I want—and there's nothing in the world I wouldn't give to get it—is, well, your friendship, Roddy; that's a way of saying it."

Rodney started and stared at her. The thing struck him, it seemed, as a sort of grotesquely irritating anticlimax.

"Gracious heaven!" he said. "My friendship! Oh, I'm in love with you! That's certainly a bigger thing."

"I don't know whether it's a bigger thing or not," she said. "But it doesn't include the other."

He was tramping up and down the room by now. "You've got my friendship," he cried out. "It's grotesque perversion of the facts to say you haven't."

She smiled at him as she shook her head. "I've spent too many months trying to get to and seeing myself fail—oh, so ridiculously—not to know what I'm talking about, Roddy."

And then, still smiling rather sadly, she told him what some of the experiments had been—some of her attempts to break into the life he kept locked away from her. "I was angry at first when I found you keeping me out," she said, "angry and hurt. I used to cry about it. And then I saw it wasn't your fault. That's how I discovered friendship had to be earned."

But her power to maintain that attitude of grave detachment was about spent. The passion mounted in her voice and in her eyes as she went on. "You thought my mind had got full of wild ideas—the wild idea I was pulling you down from something free and fine that you had been to something that you despised yourself for being and had to try to deny you were. You were wrong about that, Roddy."

"I did have an obsession, but it wasn't the thing you thought. It was an obsession that kept me quiet, and contented and happy, and willing to wait in spite of everything. The obsession was that none of those things mattered because a big miracle was coming that was going to change it all. I was going to have a job at last—a job that was just as real as yours—the job of being a mother."

Her voice broke in a fierce, sharp little laugh over the word, but she got it back in control again.

"I was going to have a baby to keep alive with my own care. There was going to be responsibility and hard work, things that demanded courage and endurance and sacrifice. I could earn your friendship with that, I said. That was the real obsession, Roddy, and it never really died until tonight. Well, I suppose I can't complain. It's over, that's the main thing."

"And now, here I am perfectly normal and well again—as good as ever. I could wear pretty clothes again and start going out just as I did a year ago. People would admire me, and you'd be pleased, and you'd love me as much as ever, and it would all be like the paradise it was last year, except for one thing. The one thing is that if I do that, I'll know this time what I really am."

With a dangerous light of anger in his eyes, he said quietly: "It's perfectly outrageous that you should talk like that, and I'll ask you never to do it again."

After ten seconds of silence, she went on: "Why, Roddy, I've heard you

describe me a hundred times. Not the you that's my lover, Roddy. The other you—talking all over the universe to Barry Lake. You've described the woman who's never been trained nor taught nor disciplined; who's been brought up soft, with the bloom on, for the purpose of making her marriageable; who's never found her job in marriage, who doesn't cook, nor sew, nor spin, nor even take care of her own children; the woman who uses her charm to save her from having to do hard, ugly things, and keep her in luxury. Do you remember what you've called her, Roddy?"

"I didn't understand any of that when you married me, Roddy; it was just like a dream to me—like a fairy story come true. But I understand now. How can you be sure, knowing that my position in the world, my friends, oh, the very clothes on my back, and the roof over my head, are dependent on your love—how are you going to be sure that my love for you is honest and disinterested? What's to keep you from wondering—asking questions? Love's got to be free, Roddy."

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